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THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

BY CHAUNCEY B. BREWSTER.

EVERYBODY knows the definition of Democracy in those immortal words of Lincoln at Gettysburg, words for which he was indebted to the Boston preacher, Theodore Parker, who, in language that may be traced back beyond him, had spoken of government "over all the people, by all the people, for all the people." This is Democracy. There is, however, here involved something more than a transfer of power from the crown to the crowd. There is what we may call the democratic ideal. Beyond democratic methods of government is an ideal regarding human nature. That ideal may be described as the recognition of the average man, without regard to length of lineage or purse, not in virtue of any power, position, or possessions, the recognition of his worth as man and of the possibility that this inherent worth may in actual fact be realized. That ideal appears invested with a divine authority as we recognize God in the onward movement of history. Toward the progress of that ideal unique service was rendered by the epoch-making philosopher of Königsberg. Kant turned attention from intellectual processes and endowments, which are exceptional and distinctive of the comparatively few, to that imperative sense of right and duty which is not confined to the few but is a universal possession of human nature. That the essential principle of worth lies not in knowledge but in will is democratic doctrine.

The democratic ideal itself the world owes to Jesus Christ. It is really a cardinal Christian principle. It is involved in the central fact that the Son of God became Son of Man with men; and into the gospel as a whole is inwrought a conception of the value and possibilities of human nature. The democratic ideal may be defined

as the recognition of the personality in all sorts and conditions of men. As such it belongs essentially to the gospel. With the doctrines, hopes, and purposes of any Christianity that in aim and spirit transcends the limits of a mere sect is wrapped up this democratic ideal. Its security depends largely upon the true and faithful witness of the Christian Church.

The democratic ideal might have seemed triumphant in France less than four generations ago. But almost immediately it was trodden down by one after another tyranny. The outlook for Democracy to-day is not what it might antecedently have been supposed to be. The horizon is not free from threatening clouds. Before now the world has seen the outward forms of republican institutions kept on, unchanged, to cloak the fact of despotism, and may have the spectacle again. For their true life, the institutions of Democracy depend upon its ideal, and that depends, more than most men imagine, upon Christianity. If that ideal is to be preserved inviolate for future generations, there will be required ampler recognition and fulfilment of the democracy inherent in Christianity. The Church has a positive witness to bear to the worth, and for the complete realization, of the personality and the personal life in all sorts and conditions of men.

The democratic ideal is menaced in America to-day by various influences and tendencies, for example, indirectly by the lowering of standards and directly by influences that may be described as plutocratic. In the first place, then, the Church's witness will consist in the upholding of high standards. With Democracy goes a tendency to lower standards quite naturally where everybody's judgment is supposed to be of equal value. To almost everybody one thing appeals, money. Thus commercialism comes largely to dominate the life of the people. Wealth accumulates and arrogates to itself power. Democracy may safely coexist with aristocracy where, as in England, it is largely an aristocracy historically bound to serve the State and the public weal. As a matter of fact, in England the body politic is more truly democratic and more sensitive to the popular will than in America. There is a measure of truth even in the paradox of Mr. Price Collier that the House of Lords "is the most democratic institution in England."* It is, one may venture to think, even now,

* "England and The English," p. 61.

and when all is said, in as close touch with the people at large as is the United States Senate. While thus entirely compatible with a genuine aristocracy of service, the democratic ideal is imperilled by a plutocracy which, in the second and third generations, is tempted to assume an emancipation from service. That temptation in America is so insidious and so strong that, although there are not a few noteworthy instances to the contrary, the plutocrat by inheritance is not so likely to be living for the community as to be living off the community. Against plutocratic influences of to-day the Church must faithfully hold up higher standards; must set its face sternly against the vulgarity that means a lack of standards, and that manifests itself in seeking only gain or in devotion to the sole pursuit of pleasure or in flaunting the luxuries and extravagancies of wealth; must persistently endeavor to win men and women to that simplicity wherein lies the true dignity of life and to that purpose of service wherein lies life's value.

The Church may well beware of maintaining such relations with the power of wealth, as to be considered or called an organ of capital. The clergy will by no means engage in the wicked work of exciting class against class. But they will take good care that they do not even seem to be retained in the interest of any privileged class. There are subtle dangers here. In America, for example, there is danger both for the Church and for Democracy in the fact that, while Church influences control almost all the leading schools for boys, the prices at those schools are so high as practically to be well-nigh prohibitory for any but the sons of the rich, and there results in large degree the training up of a wealthy class by itself.

Especially has the Church a prophetic mission to witness to righteousness. The immediate success of a democratic civilization is, for obvious reasons, more likely to be on material lines and to touch the comfort and luxury of the physical accessories of life. There is not the assurance of equal development in taste and intellectual culture. For such a civilization the salt to save from corruption must lie in moral qualities, and the tonic to save from degeneracy in moral endeavor. Inestimable service, then, toward keeping society sound and wholesome is rendered when the Church faithfully proclaims the righteousness that exalteth a nation. It is a needed office to show the personal fac-

tors entering into economic problems and to state those problems in ethical terms. The Christian Church ought to be the prophetic voice, the embodied conscience, of the time. Its witness is to be borne against commercial dishonesty. The business corporation is practically a new kind of individuality. Corporate Christianity may not rightly ignore the conduct and character of corporate associations of men. It ought to show how men can share in responsibilities as well as profits; to bring, as it were, an X-ray to penetrate the tissue of the soulless corporation and reveal personal responsibility for flagrant wrong, which is not less wrong when men are confederate against right. One corporation ought always and unmistakably to be on the side of right, and that is the corporation of Jesus Christ.

The witness to righteousness is to be borne against plutocratic corruption. There is sinister suggestiveness in the reasons given for his taking office by Lorenzo de' Medici, "Lorenzo the Magnificent." "I accepted against my will and only for the sake of protecting my friends and our own fortunes, for in Florence one can ill live in the possession of wealth without control of the government." It was not the last successful attempt by interests of a certain kind to gain control in politics. Stern witness is to be borne against the temptation in democracies to use public power for private gain, against corrupt political methods, the purchase of votes and the sale of law, against prostitution of the trust of office, against the tyranny of a cabal or a boss, against whatever perverts a government of laws, not of men. Standing for the authority of divine law over all human affairs, the Church ought to be indeed a bulwark for the cause of men. There is need to hold up the highest standards and ideals of citizenship. There are indications of a considerable enlargement of the functions of government. If it shall be so, only of the more import becomes the righteous administration of government and the more important, behind it, an intelligent and righteous public opinion. The Church cannot afford to ignore what is implied in the fact of a government that is to be the exponent of all the enlightenment and of all the virtue of a people.

In particular there should be faithful witness against that apathetic supineness, often attendant upon Democracy, which results in the withdrawal, from the burden and heat of civil life, of certain men who owe their country service. That service, it

is true, would be likely to involve some cost, not of money, but of pride, a cost larger in America than in England, where a man may suffer defeat and still gain somewhere else a seat in Parliament. Such cost, however, ought not to weigh against plain duty. Genuine civilization demands the discharge of duty by the *civis*, the citizen, the man in society. That is a fine passage in a letter of St. Augustine where, after referring to Plato's Republic, he uses the language: "There is no limit either in measure or in time to the claims which their country has upon the care and service of right-hearted men," and presently writes: "Now the churches which are multiplying throughout the world are, as it were, sacred seminaries of public instruction, in which this sound morality is inculcated and learned." The Church to-day must not be wanting in the inculcation of civic duty and public righteousness.

That temptation to withdraw from contact with the world assails the Church itself now as always. But to-day there is peculiar necessity that the Church come close with potent touch. Our age is turning from dialectics to dynamics. There is need of guidance and inspiration in a spirit of power. There may well be question whether, in dealing with matters of practical ethics and social right and wrong, the Church is not showing a lack of power and has not need to pray and strive for the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength.

It is, I trust, evident that nothing like a baleful connection with the State is necessarily implied in the office of the Church, from its high standpoint, to inspire, to elevate, and to interpret the democratic State. The Church ought to bear witness to-day, as did St. Paul under the Empire, to the majesty of the civil authority. Because, in a democratic society, humanity collectively in the commonwealth governs itself, none the less, rather all the more, is government to-day, as of old it was declared to be, the minister of God whose image humanity bears. Secular in its outward form it may be, yet in reality the State upholds great spiritual forces without which society cannot be maintained, and itself rests upon everlasting moral foundations. Its authority and life are invested with a dignity of purpose which is more than human and essentially belongs to that law whose seat is the bosom of God.

It is impossible worthily to deal with Democracy by undemo-

cratic methods. It behooves the Church in its own government and administration to exemplify the democratic principle which belongs to its best traditions. That principle has been in a former time too much overlaid by methods that were autocratic and aristocratic. It was quite in keeping with such tendencies for the bishop to dwell apart from the people, sometimes as it is unto this day at Wells, where may be seen the walls about the palace with moat and drawbridge of the fourteenth century.

There is to-day new recognition of the democratic principle, and nowhere more freely than in England. At the recent Lambeth Conference, English bishops expressed plainly their conviction that the Church ought to show a readiness to set its own house in order, and "to model its own system of government on a sound representative and democratic basis." There was adopted by the Conference a resolution that "The ministry of the laity requires to be more widely recognized, side by side with the ministry of the clergy, in the work, the administration and the discipline of the Church." First in the Anglican Communion to provide for an equal representation of the laity was the American Episcopal Church. There is, however, room for question whether, in its councils and on its parish vestries, the actual representation of laymen is sufficiently democratic. Recently Mr. John Burns, in conversation with the writer, pointed with pride to the Labor members of Parliament and to himself in the Cabinet, and said: "In America you have not a single Labor member of Congress." The councils of the Church might be open to a like criticism.

The Church should be true to the democratic ideal in ministration. It ought to be now as it was when the Lord confidently appealed to the fact that the poor had the gospel preached to them. We may well ask if it is so now, and, if not, why not? How then is the Church fulfilling this mission to proclaim good news to the poor? Some of us may wonder whether the majority of our well-to-do people have not yet to be waked up to be aware of any such mission. It is undeniable that the Church of Him who died for all is not to-day by any means reaching all. It is certainly true that the Church of Him who worked at the carpenter's trade ought to come nearer than it does to the multitudes who work with their hands to-day.

That the Church, for example in New York City, does much

for the poor is not enough. Recently has been raised the pertinent question whether much that has been given to the poor has not been a positive hindrance to the Church's real work, which is to preach the gospel to them. To preach to the poor, moreover, as brothers of the rich is necessary, not only to save souls, but to save society. There are churches where the rich and the poor meet together and together worship Him who is the maker of them all. There ought to be many more such churches than there are. It is a reproach to a congregation even to seem in the least like a club of prosperous and congenial people, to which others, less well-to-do, may not aspire to belong except in the position of pensioners. The Church is for men, whether rich or poor. With a mission to all sorts and conditions of men, it is not as it should be when certain sorts and conditions of men are in large part not receiving its ministrations.

It is time to ask whether there should not be often used very simple and flexible services, adapted to the people to be reached, and also whether the character of the music should not be such as to encourage congregational worship. With the growing ambition for anthems and solos and with an elaborate *Te Deum* too often by poor performance made a *tedium*, it is time to plead for a larger proportion of music that, while not poor and cheap, shall be democratic. "Let the people praise Thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise Thee."

There may surely be question whether, in the financial support of churches, there should not be appeal less to commercial and selfish considerations and more to Christian motives of loyal devotion, generosity and sacrifice. In fact, the pew system, as an adequate means of support, has practically broken down. Few are the parishes where it has not to be supplemented by other methods and by yearly appeals to make up a deficiency. On the other hand, who can estimate how many that system has kept from the house of their Heavenly Father! In a city church that is awake to its mission the appropriated pew, with its provision for comfortable and complacent selfishness, is an anachronism, an obstacle surviving from the past. When a new church is built, in place of pews put in chairs, and you have taken a long step toward making the church truly democratic. If it be really a question of private pew *versus* people, surely there will be no hesitation as to which shall be abandoned.

Aside from means and methods, the great company of Christians, face to face with pressing problems of the time, ought not even to seem to be dumb and impotent, paralyzed and past feeling. If they are rightly to face those problems, they need a vision of the opportunity, a widening of thought and purpose and renewing of spirit, a more robust effort and a fuller measure of the enthusiasm of humanity. The Church's effort is not to be something apart, in the rear of the battle, only for them that are sore spent and wounded in the fight. Its service ought to be that not merely of the ambulance corps, but of the column's forward march. When its stores of latent power have been fully developed, it will not be out of relation with the main currents of human energy. As in the best periods of its past, it will be a force potent in the progress of humanity onward and upward.

The Christian estimate of the worth and meaning of human life should make men view with larger understanding and sympathy all earnest efforts for human uplift. To be specific, the Society of Christians may properly recognize what is common in its own aims and those of the trades-unions. Doubtless there have been on the part of the unions instances of folly, tyranny and crime. The same might be said of the other side. Yet these associations of wage-earners have accomplished much which could not otherwise have been done. They are likely to be of immense educational value, not only through the learning that comes of making mistakes, but also through the inevitable uplift of minds earnestly working together at great problems. On good authority may be quoted a remark of Mr. Root when Secretary of State: "When I want a pastime, when I want to be stimulated, I go to a labor-union meeting and listen to a debate. I have never heard one carried on as well and so much real thought shown in a Fifth Avenue Club as I have in a labor-union meeting." If the labor organizations be headed by intelligent and disinterested leaders, they might, as Professor Sumner* suggested years ago, be made capable of undertaking a number of matters now imperfectly supervised through government inspection, for example, sanitary arrangements in factories, protection from accidents in factories and mines, limit of age for children employed, hours of labor for women and children. In many communities it would be well for the local congregation to have its

* "What Social Classes Owe to Each Other," p. 94.

representatives approach the union with a view to certain mutual relations. The Church can afford fairly and freely to recognize the ideals of the unions, the results they have accomplished, and their possibilities of further service to humanity.

When all is said, however, there remains something which the Church alone is fitted to supply and must supply if true to its mission. The manifest design and ultimate destinies of Democracy, who may adequately describe? Yet its way is not the untroubled triumphant march which has been predicted and expected by a former generation. It is a way beset, in city and State and nation, by grave problems and perils. There is need of principles, of vision, of ideals and inspirations which are found in Christianity and which the Christian Church is bound to furnish. Democracy must not turn from its ideals of humanity or be false to human nature. A prime fact of human nature is the inevitableness of religion. The faith of the Son of Man, with all its superhuman sanctions, is none the less the religion of humanity. Of that religion of humanity the Church is the organized expression and ought to be a visible embodiment and living voice seen and heard of all men.

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